

**STATEMENT OF LARRY YAMAMOTO, STATE CONSERVATIONIST,  
HAWAII  
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE HOUSE AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
CONSERVATION, CREDIT, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND RESEARCH  
APRIL 8, 2003**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, -- Aloha and thank you for the opportunity to discuss the U.S. Department of Agriculture's conservation program activity in the State of Hawaii. My name is Larry Yamamoto, and I am the State Conservationist, for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the State of Hawaii.

Mr. Chairman, the conservation activities undertaken by NRCS offer many exciting opportunities for agricultural producers and private landowners throughout our state. From areas of intense agricultural production, such as those here on the Big Island, to many rural Neighbor Island communities, our agency is working hard to assist in the conservation of natural resources and increase productivity of farming.

The natural resource issues that we face here are very special. From volcanic-based soils, and endangered species protection, to unique terrain and intense rainfall characteristics, our agricultural production faces many challenges that are not found in other parts of the country. In addition, the kinds of specialty crops produced here, such as coffee and macadamias require specialized conservation assistance from our natural resource professionals. This diversity in Hawaii's agriculture and our climatic conditions require

that our programs and people remain flexible as we meet the community's needs. These issues along with intense development in many areas of our state place further natural resource and economic pressure on our farmers and ranchers.

### **The Farm Bill and Hawaii**

Given the exceptional characteristics of Hawaii, it is to the credit of the vision and hard work of those Members of the Agriculture Committees in Congress, that many aspects of the Farm Bill conservation title are applicable, popular, and effective in our state. NRCS Chief Bruce Knight, who has met with Representative Case, and has recently visited Hawaii, has expressed a deep interest in ensuring that NRCS is working effectively to meet the individual needs of farmers, ranchers, and private landowners in Hawaii. Under Chief Knight's leadership, the agency has closely examined program allocation methods, to ensure that states like Hawaii are receiving appropriate resources to address the needs. I would note that for FY 2004, Hawaii received an increase of nearly three times the amount of Farm Bill program funding for the previous fiscal year. This increase in program funding is especially valuable given the conversion of lands that were used for the production sugarcane to other uses. Hawaii is one of a few states that is experiencing an increase in the number of farms. It is not unusual for an area that used to be one large sugarcane plantation to be converted to more than 200 new small farms.

The 2002 Farm Bill offers America's farmers and ranchers more incentives than ever before to voluntarily conserve natural resources on our nation's privately owned farmland. The Farm Bill conservation provisions help reduce erosion, guard streams and

rivers, restore and establish fish and wildlife habitat, and improve air quality. The following summary pertains to statewide financial assistance through NRCS conservation programs here in Hawaii:

*Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* -- Addresses significant natural resource concerns that are locally identified. In 2003, NRCS in Hawaii utilized \$2,110,000 for conservation planning, design and installation. 6300 acres in cropland, grazing land, and animal feeding operations were assisted through 37 contracts. Projects include noxious weed control, brush management, pasture hayland planting, constructing terraces, and establishing groundcover. 59 applications went unfunded, leaving a backlog of \$2,565,000. In fiscal year 2004, Hawaii received \$5,129,900 for this program, which will allow us to address the backlog and fund prospective new projects as well.

*Ground and Surface Water Conservation (GSWC)* -- The newest opportunity to Hawaii is part of EQIP and focuses on ground and surface water conservation. This year, Hawaii is one of 32 states receiving GSWC funds to implement contracts that install irrigation related conservation practices on agricultural lands. In fiscal year 2004, Hawaii received \$1,195,600 for this program.

*Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)* -- Helps landowners and operators restore and protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland, and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as grazinglands. In 2003, NRCS in Hawaii utilized \$1,292,000 on rental payments and restoration on five contracts which treat 4,893 acres. 29 applications

went unfunded, leaving a backlog of \$7,528,100. In fiscal year 2004, Hawaii received \$1,321,300 for this program.

*Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)* -- This program is used to develop or improve fish and wildlife habitat on private land. In 2003, NRCS in Hawaii utilized \$394,900 on seven contracts to treat 7200 acres of wetland, riparian, or upland areas. 28 applications went unfunded, leaving a backlog of \$932,900. In fiscal year 2004, Hawaii received \$506,000 for this program.

*Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)* -- This program is used for wetland restoration, enhancement, or creation on private land. In 2003, NRCS in Hawaii utilized \$140,000 on one contract to treat 246 acres of wetland and riparian areas. Two applications went unfunded, leaving a backlog of \$1,099,000. In fiscal year 2004, Hawaii received \$700,000 for this program.

*Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRLPP)* -- This program is used to help state, tribal, or local government entities to purchase the development rights to keep productive farm and ranch land in agricultural use. In fiscal year 2004, Hawaii received \$1,457,400 for this program.

### **Looking Ahead**

We are proud of our accomplishments to date and look forward to many new opportunities ahead. Throughout Hawaii, our natural resource professionals are providing excellent assistance on many environmental issues, involving creating habitat

for endangered species, protection of prime and unique soils, flood prevention, irrigation water management, and many, many more. Much of what I have addressed in my testimony has been program-related, however, there is an important component of technical expertise to consider as well. Ensuring that well-trained and well-equipped field staff is available to help landowners is of critical importance. Earlier this year, Chief Knight announced a new scholarship program that is very important to Hawaii. The new pilot Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Scholarship Program will offer scholarships to U.S. citizens who are seeking a degree in agriculture or related natural resource sciences at universities with high percentages of Asian and Pacific Islander students in California, Hawaii, Minnesota and the Pacific Basin Area. We know that attracting and maintaining staff in Hawaii will be challenging, and this new scholarship opportunity is an important tool to help develop a conservation leadership base for the future.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, we in the tropics recognize the diverse and fragile agro-ecosystems that produce a significant variety of the food, commodities, and products that we consume all over America. Given the natural climatic extremes common to these ecosystems and their vulnerability to rapid and often irreversible degradation, NRCS has established a Tropical Technology Consortium to coordinate the sharing and transfer of best technology to our the region. Members of the consortium along with NRCS are the University of Guam, the University of Puerto Rico, the University of Hawaii and the University of Florida.

Mr. Chairman, again, mahalo for the opportunity to appear here today. I hope that we will have opportunities in the future to show Members of the Subcommittee firsthand, some of the excellent conservation work that farmers and ranchers are achieving on our islands. I would happy to respond to any questions that Members might have.